THE INTERESTS OF THE Protestant Dissenters CONSIDERED.

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The INTERESTS *of the* Proteſtant Diſſenters *conſider'd.*

IT is not unuſual with Authors who write the Hiſtory, or Preſent State of a Nation, to acquaint us with its *Intereſts* in regard to its ſeveral Neighbours. Thus *Puffendorf*, in his *Introduction to the Hiſtory of* Europe, treats of the Intereſts of *France*, *Spain*, *England*, *&c.* in relation to one another, and the ſeveral other Kingdoms and States whoſe Hiſtories he hath abridg'd: And whoever ſhould write an Account of the ſeveral *Parties* that are in *Great Britain*, or any other Country, might afford us a very uſeful Diſcourſe, by ſtating what their *true Intereſts* were in reſpect to one another.

And whoever ſhould go about this Work would find, that, as the true Intereſts of Nations, ſo that of Parties *in* Nations, and indeed of the Bulk of private Perſons in their private Capacity, is but imperfectly purſued, and very often oppoſed, by thoſe whoſe particular Care it ſhould have been to promote it. In private Life the ſelfiſh Paſſions added to the ſhort-ſighted Views Men have of Things, carry them aſide from their true and real Intereſt: among Nations, in abſolute Monarchies eſpecially, the prevailing Humour and Inclination of the Monarch, or perhaps of his chief Favourite to whom he leaves all the Care of Publick Affairs, determines what ſhall be the Purſuit of that Nation for *his* Time: and to ſpeak of Parties, they are led away from their true Intereſts by the groundleſs *Prejudices* they are apt to conceive of each other, and by the Heat and Zeal of the Bigots amongſt them.

In the following ſhort Eſſay I purpoſe to ſhew in general what is the true Intereſt of Parties both religious and political, applying

plying it particularly to the *Proteſtant Diſſenters.*

Firſt then; in the firſt place I lay down this as an unalterable Truth, that it is the Intereſt of all Parties *to do Juſtice to one another.* This is the ſame as to Nations in regard one to another; and the ſame as to private Perſons. All Hatred, Animoſities, Conteſts and Wars proceed from the Want of a ſtrict Obſervance of the Rules of Juſtice. I do not mean by Juſtice among Parties, the abſtaining only from the higher Acts of Violence and Oppreſſion; but alſo from the leſſer ones of Excluſions and Qualifications, called *Negative Diſcouragements*, by which one Party finds a Way to debar the other Party of their due Share of the Truſts, Employs, Profits or Honours of the State. Juſtice is ſtrict in her Nature, admits of no Degrees, not the leaſt Degree of Injury. And he that ſhould touch but the Hair of the Head of another on account of his Way of Worſhip or Sentiments merely religious, and not prejudicial or relating to the State, is either one who hath not Strength of

Reaſon ſufficient to get the better of ſome ill Prejudices received in Education, and to diſcern and know what the natural Rights of Mankind are; or wants ſuch Maſtery of his Paſſions and Humours as is requiſite to conſtitute an *Honeſt Man*. The *Diſſenters*, one would think, ſhould ſee moſt clearly the Evidence of this Truth, ſince being the ſmall Party, and the Party undermoſt, it is ſo plainly their Intereſt as well as Right that it be acknowledged; yet till of late Years through a narrowneſs and rigidneſs of Principle they were not univerſally convinced of it. The *Presbyterians* ſaw clear enough that they themſelves had a Right to a full Liberty of Conſcience; but were not ſo clear that the *Quakers* had; nor that other *Chriſtians*, though in Error, had ſo too; much leſs would they extend it to thoſe who were no Chriſtians at all. But now they have learned to know that the Rights of all Men are by Nature equal, whatever their Religion be; that the End for which we become Members of Society, or continue in it, and ſubject ourſelves to the Government of Laws and of Magiſtrates,

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is not that the Religion of the Majority may be enforced upon the few; but it is, that our *Perſons* and *Properties* may be protected, equally protected from the Violences of one another; and if from hence, Religion, merely as ſuch, comes at all under the Magiſtrates Cognizance, it muſt be to the end that he protect each one in a free Exerciſe and Enjoyment of that, which each one for himſelf, and for the time being, not what the Magiſtrate for him, judges to be the true Religion, and the true and right way of Worſhip, and what God will require of him; and that a Religion which teacheth the contrary of this Truth, that is, that teacheth to oppreſs or moleſt others on account of their religious Worſhip or Opinions merely religious, and no ways detrimental to other Men's Rights, may be juſtly excepted from this Rule of *equal Protection*; as it doth juſtly forfeit its Right hereto. But the Diſſenters and their Teachers have now ſo fully declared their Sentiments on this Subject, namely, that they are for univerſal Liberty of Conſcience; that they cannot now be charged, as in former times,

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with acting againſt and giving up their true Intereſt, by allowing of ſome Principles of Perſecution, with an abſurd Exception for *themſelves only*. Therefore I now paſs on, and,

In the next place, next to doing Juſtice, or perhaps in order to it, it is the Intereſt of Parties *to get rid of the Prejudices and violent Diſlike of each other, which deſigning Men, joining in with the Heat and Fury of the over-bigotted ones, have been able to poſſeſs themſelves with.* The *Whigs* aſſume to themſelves, as if it were their peculiar *Motto*, the Words *Liberty and Property*, and many are made to believe that the oppoſite Party, the *Tories*, are not as tenacious of them as themſelves: And it may be ſo, as to the lower ſort, the furious Mob, and the High-Church Clergy, and the Jacobite Party among them; but as to the reſt, I much doubt whether any one can name one *Tory Gentleman* in the whole Iſland, that has a good Eſtate, and a common Share of Senſe, but what would ſtruggle as hard to preſerve all thoſe Rights and Liberties

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to his Perſon, and Securities to his Eſtate, which our Laws and Conſtitution give, as could have been expected from him, had he been ever ſo ſtaunch a Whig. The *High-Church Clergy* did indeed after the Reſtoration advance a Doctrine entirely inconſiſtent either with Liberty or Property, I mean that of *Paſſive Obedience*; and very probably deluded King *James* ſo far as to have ſome Reliance on it: But even among them there were thoſe who ſhew'd by coming into the Revolution, that that Doctrine would not hold them: And the Writers on the High-Church Side have no other Occaſions plainly told us, that *Nature will rebel againſt Principle*; and that we cannot rely on that Doctrine for any extraordinary Submiſſion from the Party. The beſt Way, one ſhould think, to know the real Sentiments of a Party is to obſerve the *Laws* that have paſſed in their Time of Superiority, and that have been promoted by them at other times. It was from the Aſſiſtance of the *Tory* Party, though it was not in a Tory Parliament, that we obtained the *Triennial Act* in King *William*'s

Time; a Law founded upon the trueſt Principles of Liberty; for certainly the oftner a Repreſentative is choſen, the more truly and properly is it ſuch; and I am ſure it was not a *Tory* Parliament that repealed it. What fitter Law could be contrived to preſerve our Conſtitution, and the Dignity of Parliaments, than that *Act* which requires that every Member have at leaſt 300 *l. per annum* in Land? A Law which gives a publick Leading and Limitation to the Electors to place their Truſt in the Hands where it ought to be; and where they would of themſelves naturally place it, unleſs when miſguided by unfit Motives; that is, in the Hands where the *fixed* Property is; and are therefore the fitteſt to watch for its Preſervation, and the leaſt capable to be ſeduced from their Fidelity by other Conſiderations. And was not this Law framed and paſſed by a *Tory* Parliament, under a *Tory* Adminiſtration, and, I think, without one Negative? To paſs now to the other Side, and ſpeak of the falſe Prejudices which the Tories conceive againſt the Whigs. One of them is, that they imagine

gine that the Whigs are *Republicans*, and want to ſet up a Commonwealth: Whereas whoever converſeth much with them, will hardly find any one, that hath ſo much as a Scheme, or juſt Notion what a real Commonwealth is; and without a Scheme it is impoſſible to aim at a Commonwealth; becauſe that is aiming at a mere empty Name, without an Idea fixed to it: And thoſe few, if any ſuch there be, as have formed to themſelves a Scheme, muſt have Senſe enough to know that no one can ſet up a *Commonwealth* without having Power enough at the ſame time to ſet up *Himſelf*; and that Self-Intereſt, in that Caſe, will always prevail: As *Cromwell*, who could have ſet up a Commonwealth, and had at times declared he would do ſo, choſe to ſet up himſelf inſtead of it. However, I ſhould think the Whigs might now be fully cleared from any Charge of that kind, ſince during ſo long a Courſe of Time, in which they have been uppermoſt, there is ſo little Reaſon to accuſe them of introducing Laws founded on Republican Principles. But I proceed now to

Another political Rule, adapted more eſpecially for the ſmaller and weaker Parties, which is this; *not to attach themſelves immoveably to the Service of any other Party*; but to preſerve their *Independency*; and to have always in view the keeping a due *Balance* among the other and greater Parties. For the Friendſhips among Parties are like the Alliances among States, which are no longer preſerved than while one ſtands in need of the others Help. And when one Party becomes ſo ſtrong, as not to want the Aſſiſtance of their leſſer Allies, they will not treat them any longer with the Regard that is due to Friends. 'Tis dangerous therefore for the ſmaller Party to aid their Friends ſo much; as till their Friends want their Help no longer; as likewiſe it is ſometimes adviſable to forbear aiding them, that they may be put upon obſerving the Uſe they are of to them, and thence be induced to make ſuitable Returns. And there is another Inconvenience attending the leſſer Party's making theſe defenſive and offenſive Alliances with a greater

ter one, in that by ſo doing they draw upon themſelves the Diſlike and Hatred of powerful Adverſaries. It is a Miſtake of the *Diſſenters* to imagine that the Diſlike of the Tories towards them is merely on account of their *tender Conſciences*: far from it; one cannot but love the *Exactneſs* of the ſcrupulous Man, and very readily excuſe what ſeems ſuperfluous Care and needleſs Caution; provided his Scrupulouſneſs doth really proceed from the tender Temper of his Mind, and the Strictneſs of his Virtue, and is therefore uniform in all his Commerce with the World, and throughout the whole Conduct of his Life. But the Diſlike of the Tories is greatly heighten'd by this, that the Diſſenters are always a dead Weight againſt them at the *Elections*: They appear to a Man, ſo ſtrictly, one would think they were to be ſhot for Deſertion, if abſent. The Diſſenters may probably find, that they have reaſon to blame their own Conduct, in not obſerving the Rule here laid down, and muſt feel the Conſequence till an Opportunity offers of acting by a better Policy, that is, by the Rule of Policy above advanced.

vanced. I will here add one thing, that this ſeems to be the moſt ſeaſonable time, if it be ever poſſible, to moderate the Diſlike that the Tories have of the Diſſenters; ſince the Diſpute and Controverſy of this Age is not, as formerly, about Rites and Ceremonies, all that is ceaſed, out of Date, and eſteemed trifling; but now the Controverſy on Foot is about the Foundations and Truth of Chriſtianity itſelf; in which the Diſſenting Writers, greatly to their Honour, ſtand among the ableſt and faireſt Champions.

I would here mention what relates only to ſome of the Diſſenters, in which I hope to give no Offence to any of their Clergy; for I am ſure I mean none; but think them as learned a Body of Divines in Proportion to their Number, and of as charitable a Temper, and of as exemplary Lives, as any in the World; but yet, I don't know how it is, They are not all of them the beſt Adviſers for the Intereſts of their Party; and perhaps may not prove ſo on the Occaſion I have now in View. However the Diſſenters have no

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reaſon to be concerned that their Teachers bear this Character of the *Childreu of Light*, that they are not ſo *wiſe in their Generation*, nor always ſo good Adviſers for their Temporal and Political Concerns, as ſome others may be. We ſee that the *Quakers*, who have no Clergy, manage their Intereſts better; and tho' they be but a ſmall Party, with what eaſe did they obtain a Law, that their *ſolemn Declaration* in many Caſes ſhould be equal to other Men's *Oaths*.

And now I come to take Notice of the preſent great *Complaint* of the Diſſenters. They think it very hard that, tho' it is allow'd that they are univerſally and moſt zealouſly well affected to the Proteſtant Settlement in his Majeſty's Illuſtrious Houſe, they ſhould be forced to bear a peculiar and very irritating Mark of *Diſtinction* and *Diſgrace*, by being incapacitated for any Truſts and Employs in the Government. But where can they more juſtly lay the Blame, than on their own *weak* Conduct? They have attached themſelves to the Whigs ever ſince the Revolution with

with ſo ſtrict an Adherence as if they did not take themſelves to be a *Free* Party. No wonder then that the Whigs think that they can rely upon having their Service, however they treat them. Upon how ſmall a Motive therefore did their *Dear Friends*, the Whigs, conſent to and bring upon them the *Occaſional Bill* in Queen *Anne*'s Time? And that was the firſt and leading Step taken againſt the Diſſenters in the four laſt memorable Years of her Reign, and that was afterwards followed with another by the *Schiſm Act*, which perhaps might never have been thought of, or at leaſt not puſh'd for ſo ſoon, had not the firſt Step been then already got over by the Conſent and Management of the Whigs: And with what Slowneſs and Delay, and after how much Sollicitation did they repeal either of theſe Acts, when it was in their Power? It would be therefore very imprudent in the Diſſenters, at this time, to apply to any Miniſters of State to deſire Relief; not only becauſe no one ought to ask or receive a Piece of Juſtice as a Favour; but alſo becauſe having deviated ſo long

from

from the Rule of Policy above laid down, it will be believed that they may in great meaſure be prevailed on ſtill to deviate from it; and therefore could expect to receive no other Anſwer than, that, *this is not a proper Time: Another Day and Time it may be done: My Heart is in it*; or the like. But the Advice I would give to the Diſſenters is this, namely, at the next Election of Members of Parliament to TARRY AT HOME, to make that Time of *Agitation* and *Conteſt* to be unto themſelves a Time of *Reſt* and of *Peace*; for ſure they, who by ſad Experience find that they have *no Friends*, ſhould in Prudence make as few Enemies as poſſible.

I might urge to the Diſſenters the Fitneſs of the Conduct I have recommended from a more generous Principle, than merely that of their own Party-Intereſt; ſince it is the Intereſt of all the Lovers of Liberty in general, that all Reſtraints and Diſcouragements from a free Enquiry, and *Free Choice* in Matters of Religion be removed. And this that I have recommended is the ONLY Method, and the Me-

thod that *muſt* at length *prevail* with thoſe who have it in their Power to remove them. Hence a right Behaviour of the Diſſenters on this Occaſion is an extended Concern and a common Cauſe. And this brings me now to ſay who they be, that are the real *Friends* of the Diſſenters. Though they be few in Number, yet are they not inconſiderable in Weight; but are not found among Parties, merely as a Party, and very ſeldom among Miniſters of State; but are to be found among ſuch *Gentlemen* as have unto good Parts and Knowledge join'd a *Freedom of Thought* and free Enquiry into Matters of Religion. Theſe are Friends to the Diſſenters not from any Similitude of having the ſame Scruples with them; but from conſidering them as a Party engaged in Intereſt to be for *Liberty*; and from whom they very reaſonably *expect* their beſt Endeavours to root up and extirpate the *evil Spirit* of Perſecution from amongſt us; but if the Diſſenters ſhould fail their Expectation herein, and ſhew themſelves capable of being cajol'd into a Belief, that there can be a *Time improper* to do Juſtice

ſtice or remove Oppreſſion, then, after that, they muſt be conſidered as a Party *uſeleſs* to ſuch an End: And thus the *Diſſenters* might loſe the *beſt Friends* they have.

I WILL conclude with adding a political Obſervation concerning *Treaties* between Nations, which is very applicable to *Agreements* between Parties and with Great Men. The great *Secret* with the skilful in that Affair, is often no more than this; to propoſe ſuch Articles as are in themſelves equal and reaſonable, and then to contrive it ſo, that the other Nation with whom they treat ſhall be to *perform firſt*; ſo that if they ſhall find it for their purpoſe afterwards to perform their own Part, then to be ſure they will boaſt loudly of their nice Honour in Obſervance of Treaties; but if they ſhall think it more for their Intereſt to decline the Performance, then they will value themſelves as *conſummate Politicians* in having made a *ridiculous Cully* of the other. Now, if the Diſſenters ſhould agree to continue in the Service of the Whigs upon *Promiſes* (tho' never ſo ſolemn) of treating them in

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a *future Time* more like Friends than they have hitherto done, that is, at a *Time* when they ſhall not want their Help and Service, and ſhall be ſecure from any Reſentment on failure of Promiſe till ſeven Years after; this, I ſay, would be falling into that ſilly Share of *performing firſt*. But if, on the contrary, the Whigs in this Caſe, ſhould perform firſt, and *now* make the Diſſenters ſome Recompence for the forty Years Service they have received from them, they might ſafely rely on having the Returns of an hearty Aſſiſtance; ſince Experience ſhews that the Diſſenters are not haſty in quitting thoſe whom they have been accuſtomed to call their Friends, tho' they be ſuch as treat them with Neglect; and much leſs could they be ſuppoſed to do it, when more firmly tied, by having newly received an Obligation.

FINIS.

ERRATUM.

Page 8. line 12. for *themſelves* read *them*.